



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

Complexity of concern: Social acceptance of wind energy and the inevitability of dissensus

Ellis, P. G. (2014). *Complexity of concern: Social acceptance of wind energy and the inevitability of dissensus*. Paper presented at Wind2050 - Controversy over Energy Technologies: What shapes Community Acceptance over Wind Power?, Copenhagen, Denmark. <http://www.wind2050.dk/Events>

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:

[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

Publisher rights

Copyright 2014 The Author

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact openaccess@qub.ac.uk.

Complexity of concern:
**Social acceptance of wind energy and
the inevitability of dissensus**

Geraint Ellis

School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering
Queen's University, Belfast
g.ellis@qub.ac.uk

- The concept of 'acceptance';
- Drivers of opposition/acceptance;
- The goal of acceptance strategies?
- The need for some fresh thinking...

Community acceptance

Related to the acceptance of specific wind energy developments by host communities.

The Concept of Social Acceptance

(after Wustenhagen et al 2007)

Social Acceptance of Wind Energy

Socio-political acceptance

Related to acceptance of wind technology as a viable energy source and supported in government policy and by the general public

Market acceptance

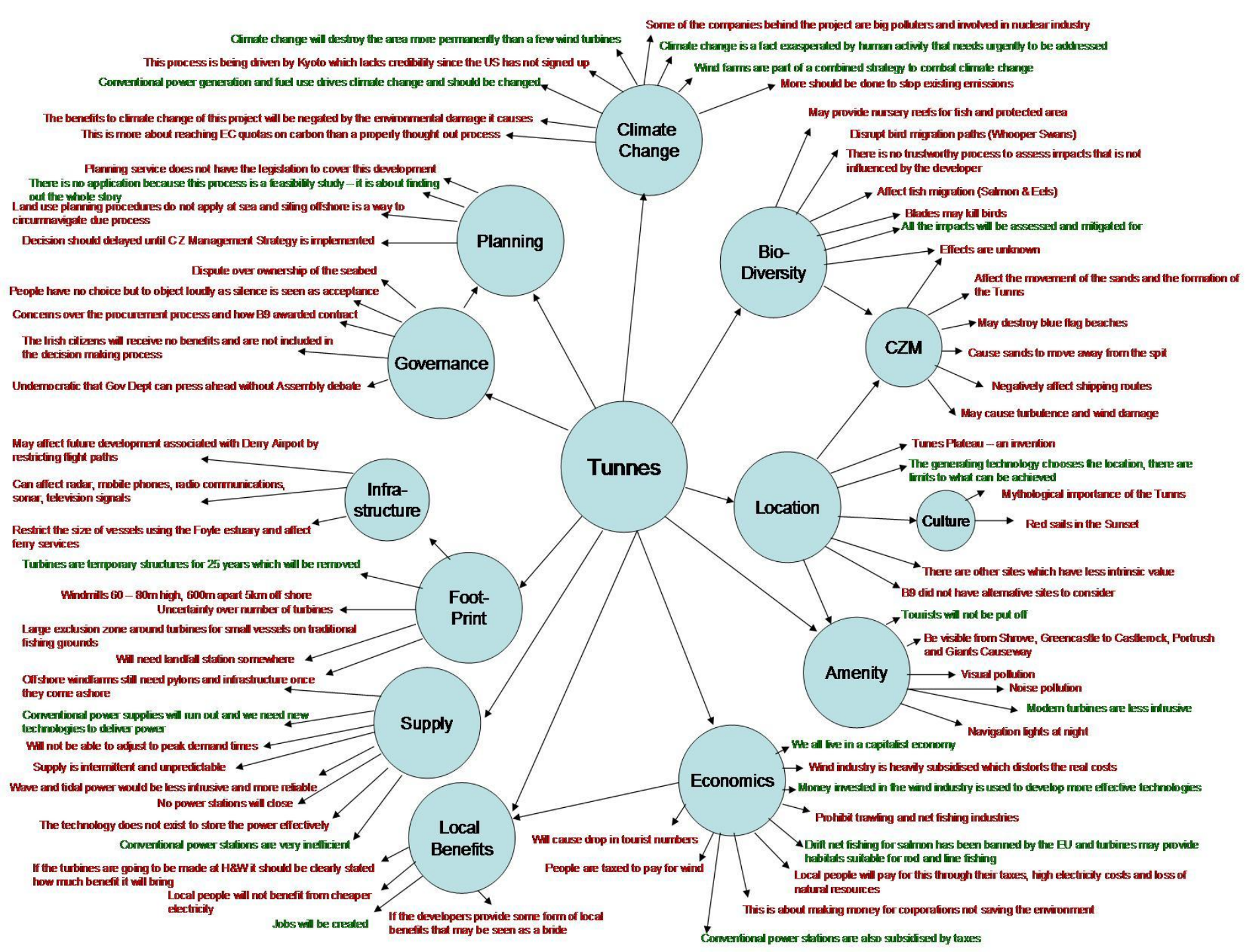
Related to the acceptance of wind technology by investors, financial institutions and consumers of electricity

The language of 'acceptance'

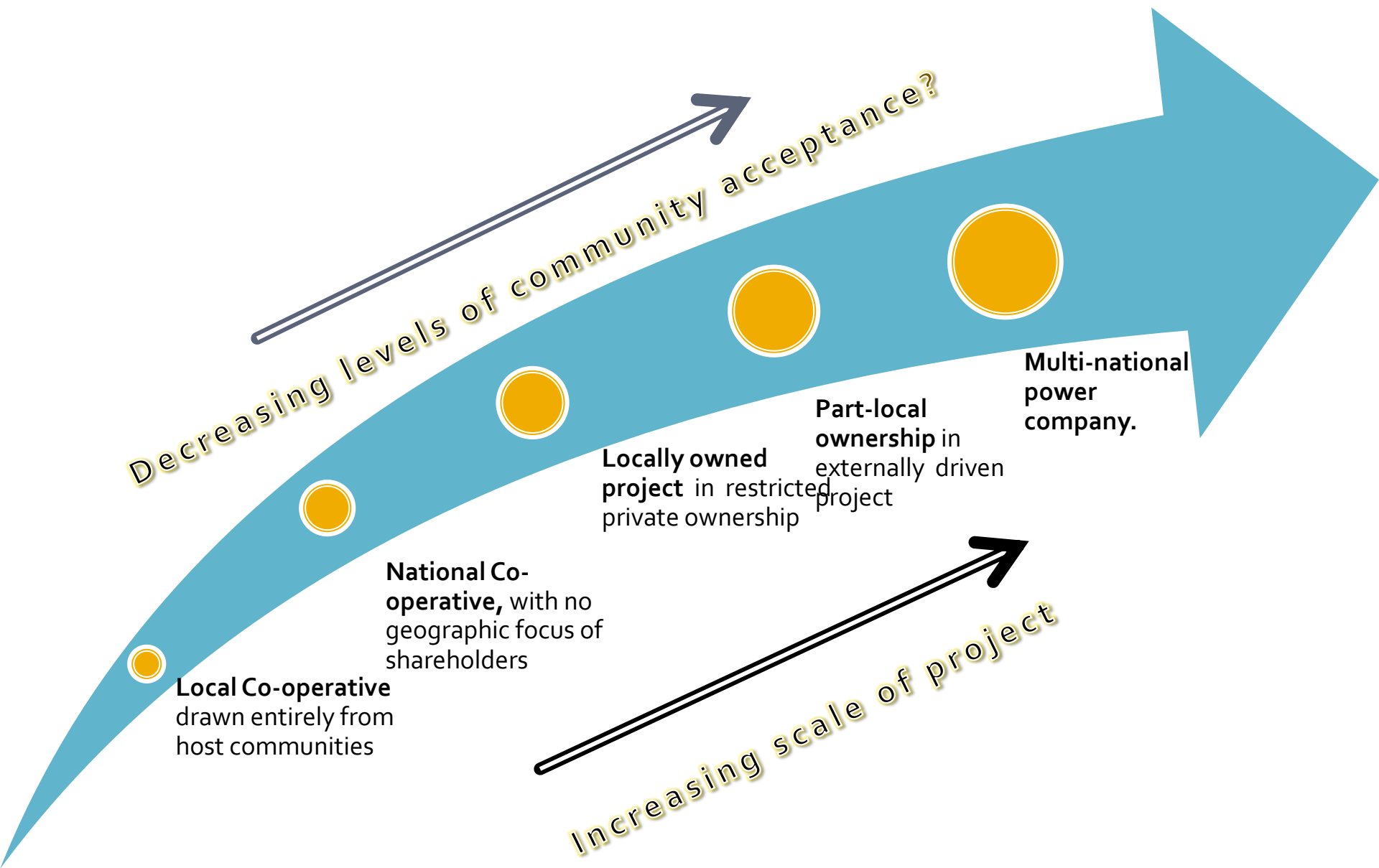
- Social acceptance has been an invaluable concept for focussing on the 'problem' and its elements.
- Batel and Devine Wright (2013) and the language of acceptance;
 - 'Acceptance' justifies, legitimises and reproduces the top-down perspectives
 - It largely focussing on objectors;
 - It neglects terms such as support, uncertainty, resistance, or apathy.
- This also tends to prioritise the consenting process, not long term relationships,
- It this allows 'winners' rather than a settling of differences
- Are there alternatives or supplements to the concept'?

Opposition to wind energy projects is driven by:

- **Health and environmental impacts;**
 - Concerns over visual, bio-diversity, well-being impacts on local area etc;
- **Fairness of decision-making process;**
 - Lack of trust in developers, regulators and the transparency of the consenting regime;
- **Perceived distribution of costs and benefits;**
 - Fear that external companies accrue key benefits, while local communities bear main costs;



Scale-acceptance trade offs?



Multi-level scales of concern and governance

- Multi-scalar influences on energy governance and the drivers for wind energy. For example in the UK:
 - Global energy/climate concerns
 - EU targets;
 - Energy as a UK national issue;
 - Reliance of devolved administrations for delivery of renewables;
 - The 'territorialisation' of energy through the municipal planning process;
 - Local site battles aim to reframe level and scale of concerns.
- *Apart from local site disputes, the spatial dimension of energy policy/governance is largely undeveloped.*

Complexity of concern

- The normative goal of policy remains consensus, although this is rarely, if ever found.
- Dissensus across spatial scales of governance and project size, yet acceptance tends to be focused on individual projects.
- Dissensus across and between many key stakeholders, yet attention is largely focussed on objectors;
- Intricacies and influence of local cultures and contexts.



So where does this leave us?

- Community acceptance increasingly looking like it will define the ultimate level of wind energy across Europe;
- The situation seems to be getting worse rather than improving;
- Responses seem ad hoc (e.g. Community benefits)
- We don't really know what is working, what isn't?
- Weak links between energy and planning policy
- Timeframes seem inadequate;
- Institutions, cultures and practices seem to be inadequate to the challenge of community acceptance.
- How can we stimulate innovation and experimentation?

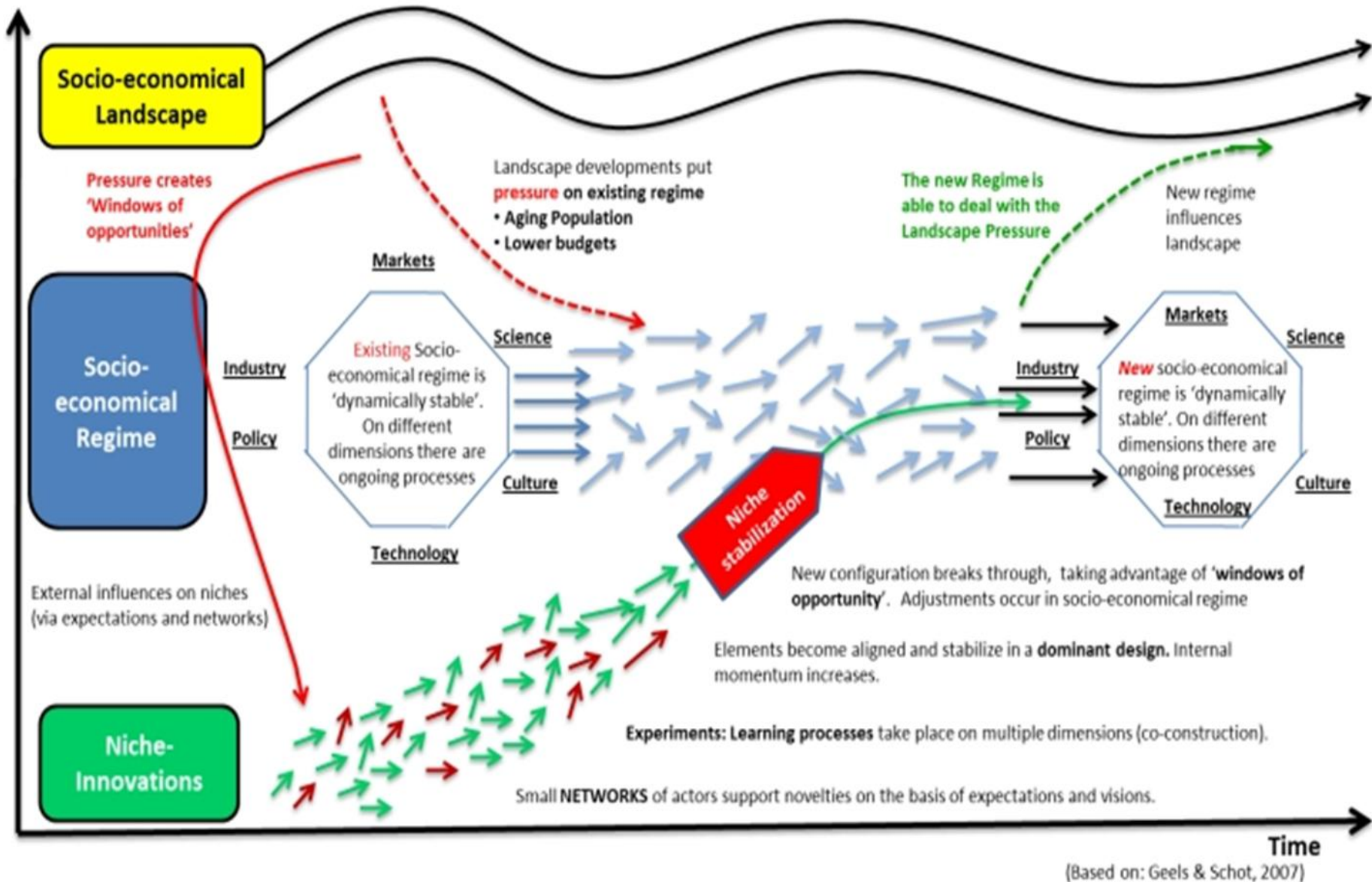


Re-thinking acceptance?

- Replace acceptance with 'Transition' as the central focus of research enquiry and policy;
- Engage more stakeholders, as different scales and chronologies;
- Explore the appropriate use of authoritarian, competitive and collaborative processes



Increasing structuration
of activities in local
practices



'Acceptance' as a Transition issue

- Reinforces energy as socio-technical system;
- Helps focus on the need to foster innovation niches for approaches to acceptance;
- Awareness of the influence of the regime to be open to such experiences;
- Gives rise to concepts such as :
 - Tension: mismatches between the regime and the landscape
 - Stress: internal mismatches within the regime
 - Pressure: mismatch from niches upwards
- The need for a long term vision, careful management and scope for innovation

Elements of a better approach to community acceptance



Some suggestions...

■ **Government Actions:**

- A 30 year national transition plan- structures, cultures, practices
- Local transition plans
- Community energy strategy
- A focus on trust building in policy and decision making

■ **Regulator Actions:**

- Transparent decision-making with adequate opportunities for voice, in which all are respected;
- Linking planning policy with energy policy;
- Compulsory local share offers;
- Community benefit register;
- Rethinking ownership of wind as an asset?

Some suggestions...

■ **Corporate actions:**

- Recognising, mitigating and avoiding local impacts;
- Promoting innovation through competition for sites: Community wind auctions;
- Greater self regulation or accreditation?

■ **Community actions:**

- Local advocacy and links to sustainability strategies (e.g. Transition Towns, LA21);
- Promotion of Co-operatives and community asset transfers;
- Increased use of intermediary bodies;
- Deliberative processes for local energy strategies.

Final words

- Is acceptance still a useful concept?;
- How can we conceptualise and manage the complexity of acceptance?;
- What are the implications of rejecting consensus and recognising the inevitability of dissensus?;
- Using Transition Studies to reframe 'acceptance' issues.

Thank you